

Under the Same Sky: Cairo

RANDA SHAATH

I lived for ten years on the 14th floor of a high-rise in Cairo. I was amazed to discover the vast variety of life on the rooftops that lay beneath me. I took photos, excited by the different scenes of daily life that I witnessed. The people who live on the rooftops have a different and separate life from the people who live in the buildings themselves; those residents as well as the pedestrians on the street below have no idea what goes on above them. My discovery led me to try and document this unique phenomenon, one extra detail in the complexities of the city of 16 million people. Some rooftop dwellers were hesitant to be photographed or to speak of their experience. They feared being evicted and losing their small place in the heart of the city. Others were embarrassed by the stigma that assumed that people living on the roof were servants. I met artists and writers who had transformed rooftops to studios and living space and men and boys who escaped the din of the city to fly their pigeons.

The lives of rooftop dwellers in Cairo today bear little relation to the family roof activities of the 1920's. The roof is no longer an area of privacy, rooftop dwellers today share bathrooms and public areas. No secrets can be hidden. The ubiquitous satellite dishes bring a version of the world far beyond the view. The rooftop has become a new kind of community.

Under the Same Sky: Rooftops of Cairo

The book is part of the series of publications being developed parallel to the project 'Contemporary Arab Representations', initiated by Witte de With, center for contemporary art, Rotterdam and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona. Publisher Arab/English edition: Witte de With, Rotterdam, ISBN 90-73362-601.



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Under the Same Sky: Rooftops of Cairo 2002–2003

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**First day of war on Iraq. Cairo,
20 March 2003**



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